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THE NATIONAL CONSUMER-RETAILER COUNCIL
SURVEY ON MERCHANDISE LABELS

Preliminary results on the labeling survey of the National Consumer-Retailer Council show that consumers, retailers and manufacturers are convinced that there should be more specific information on merchandise labels than is found at the present time. The survey was based on check lists for twelve articles prepared by a committee of consumers and retailers on the Council. Each check list presented items which would be of assistance to prospective purchasers in judging what a commodity is made of, how it is made, and what it will do, and which would give any information essential to the proper care or use of the article. These check lists were circulated among their members by the American Association of University Women, the American Home Economics Association, the National Retail Dry Goods Association, and the American Retail Federation. In addition the Council arranged to have check lists on given commodities sent to the manufacturers of the products in question.

Returns from more than 640 persons show a very considerable agreement among consumers, retailers, and manufacturers as to the importance of labeling most of the textile products covered in the survey as to their fiber content, and size. There was also a good deal of unanimity as regards the desirability of having detailed instructions as to washability on the labels of textile products.

More than half of the consumers who ranked the items in 10 of the 12 check lists circulated by the Council rated all but two of the types of information enumerated on the check lists as of "primary importance" to the consumer. The other two check lists covered mattresses and kitchen knives. Sixty percent or more of the consumers after considering what might be covered in labels for mattresses specified that they wanted to have information on the following items before they buy a new mattress:

What it is made of
Filling: Fiber content
Total weight
Percent of each by weight
Grade
Innerspring unit:
Number and size of coils
How encased
Pad: Fiber content
Thickness
Covering:
Type of fabric
How it is made
Type of mattress
Size:
Length: width
Thickness
For a bed of what size
Total weight
Tufts: Method of fastening

What it will do

Compressibility:

recoverability

Conformity to state and
federal bedding laws

How to care for it

Special instructions for turning,
summing, airing, cleaning

Sponsor:

Name and address

As regards kitchen knives, more than half of the consumers reviewing their experience with the knives they have bought in the past specified that before they buy another knife they would like to have the facts as follows:

What it is made of

Metal:

Kind

Chromium or other alloy

Hardness

Material of handle

How it is made

Maximum thickness of blade

Method of fastening handle to blade

What it will do

Characteristics of handle

Recommended use

Sponsor:

Name and address

There was a good deal of difference of opinion as to the point at which the thickness of the knife blade should be measured - at the handle or near the point; at the back of the blade or one-eighth of an inch from the cutting edge, but 70 percent of the consumers making the list specified that they wanted a measure of thickness at one point or another.

Just now retailers are getting ready to market women's wash dresses and it is of considerable interest to list the types of information which half or more of the consumers wrote in that they wanted to have before they buy a wash dress.

What it is made of

Fibers used in fabric and
percent of each by weight

Number of yarns per inch

Weighting and sizing

Special finishes

How it is made

Size:

Bust

Waist

Hips

Length

Seams

What it will do

Color permanence of fabric,
trimming, etc., each;

To sunlight

To washing

To perspiration

Breaking strength

Resistance to yarn slippage

Shrinkage or stretchage

How to care for it

Washability: special and
detailed instructions

Sponsor

Name and address

In analyzing these returns retailers will take account of the fact that the consumers taking part in the survey are not "average consumers." They have had more opportunity for special study of their purchasing problems than the average woman, but about half of them are graduates of colleges specializing in the liberal arts, rather than in technical subjects. Retailers will also take account of the fact that the incomes of the consumers taking part in the survey are above average for the population as a whole, that they represent a very considerable purchasing power, and that they have a very considerable influence in determining long-run trends in the point of view of customers in retail stores.

The check lists have been analyzed with the cooperation of the Consumer Standards Project of the Consumers' Counsel in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. The complete report on the survey will include an analysis of the number of consumers, retailers and manufacturers recommending certain groups of items for the labels of each commodity, and a summary of the comments written in on the check lists or in letters accompanying the replies.

Prepared by
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Consumers' Counsel Division
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